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ABSTRACT

Noting that educators need to capture the interest of primary students early on to make lifelong writers out of them, this paper discusses ways to encourage the writing process in the primary grades. The paper discusses the philosophy of the writing process, what experts say about writing, setting up the environment, writing with lower primary grades, writing with upper primary grades, topic choice, invented spellings, conferences, editing and revising, new directions, publishing, writing across the curriculum, and problems. The paper concludes that the success of encouraging the writing process in the primary grades depends largely on the teacher. Encouraging the writing process in the primary grades may be difficult but it is important. Contains 22 references. (RS)

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HOW TO ENCOURAGE THE WRITING PROCESS IN PRIMARY GRADES

Research Project
Marcia LaMedica

Seminar
Problems in Early Education

SUNY-New Paltz
March 1995

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I first experienced the joy of the written word in third grade. The teacher asked the class to describe anything in the room using as much detail as we could. Being able to write about anything we wanted was a new experience for me, and I was thrilled. I looked about the room and chose something very simple--the yellow number two pencil I held in my hand. The words tumbled forth from me. I found it easy to say alot about my pencil. Later, I distinctly remember being singled out by my teacher for the good job I did on my description. I had told of teethmarks adorning the side of the pencil, explaining that they were put there while nervously taking tests. She liked my word choice. She liked the details I had used. I had enjoyed doing the writing. Being praised in front of the class for my thinking and my efforts was a bonus. I was ecstatic. After that, I decided writing could be fun and rewarding.

My writing experiences were not always so positive. Years later, in a college creative writing course, I remember waiting with apprehension to see which of our writings the professor would choose to read aloud for the students to critique. My professor would lead the discussion, his dark eyes darting across the class, always with a deadpan expression. He was careful never to let us know his true opinion on any piece. Most of my creations were misunderstood, and received with ambivalence or negative comments by my classmates. I remember being terribly bemused, and confused in that class. I felt there was no structure, no teaching, no help. I did not know how to go about improving my writing. and I definitely did not enjoy writing anymore.

Both of these classroom experiences had a direct effect on my willingness to write afterward. The way writing is handled in the classroom will foster positive or negative attitudes about writing. Writers need input and encouragement to persist in facing the blank

page and composing their thoughts. Educators need to capture the interest of primary students early on in order to make life long writers out of them.. Encouraging the writing process in the primary grades is an important and difficult task.

Philosophy

Some basic philosophy emerges from all the differing opinions on the writing process. In this modern day of machines, and television, children need to do writing more than ever. If children are allowed to find their own topics, their writing will have personal meaning to them. Children have an inherent desire to write if their early efforts are not quashed and murdered by bad teaching. The teaching of writing is a challenging undertaking which must be done by people who struggle with writing themselves.

Katie Johnson best sums up why we need to teach children to write:

> Writing is one very good way for humans to get some distance on problems, to get in touch with what is going on inside ourselves at any age...Another reason that it is important to continue to teach writing in school, and to greatly increase the amount of writing done in elementary schools in American, is television. All the children in our schools today have been brought up to, with , and sometimes by television. All they have to do to is listen and watch. Television can blot out their own images, and gives them an unfair assessment of their own images as wrong, to speak only of the visual side of television. And as far as language is concerned, they merely listen: No conversation is expected by the screen, and any talking is probably discouraged by others watching. Many

> children spend many hours in such a passive state. When they come to school, then they have no experience in knowing how to organize their thoughts into speech. Writing is a way to help them do this. Indeed, it is what writing does. (1987, 8)

Funderburk further promotes the teaching of writing by saying, "The most important proposition that an educator can derive from Piaget's work is that children learn best from concrete activities. Thus classroom techniques need to accommodate for more concrete activity and writing is clearly one of these." (1986, 2)

Writing is something all children want to do. Graves and Stuart say, "Most adults think children don't want to write. But children want to make sense of the world around then, and writing can help them do that. Through writing, children can discover new ways of thinking, seeing, listening, and reading. They can learn about themselves and find their own writing voices." (1985, 4)

"The teaching of writing," Donald Graves says, "demands the control of two crafts, teaching and writing. They can neither be avoided, nor separated. The writer who knows the craft of writing can 't walk into a room and work with students unless there is some understanding of the craft of teaching. Neither can teachers who have not wrestled with writing, effectively teach the writer's craft." (1983, 6) As I vividly recalled in my third grade and college experiences, what a teacher does in the writing class will either foster enthusiasm and satisfaction or dread and frustration. "Set the tone: Children are affected by what the teacher does. Show them writing as a laboratory or studio subject. Instead of giving writing to children, you will share it with them. You will write with them," Graves advises. (1983, 12)

Choosing your own topic instead of assigned topics is very positive. Katie Johnson says:

> When you have engaged a child in his own writing, when you have hooked him to reading and writing his own very important words, sentences, and stories, the focus of his attention to his work is very powerful. The very choosing of his own word or story is a commitment to that word or that idea: he will give it his full attention, the full play of his inner resources. It belongs to him. (1987, 162)

What the Experts Say About Writing

Children must write daily in order to learn the writing experience. Like any difficult and new skill, success will only be attained with constant attempts. Discouragement can set in easily if not enough time is given to learning how to write.

Children can start writing as soon as they can hold a writing implement in their hand. Graves and Stuart say, "Most adults think children can't write until they can read. But children can learn to write the same way they learn to talk, by going through a series of ever-improving approximations of what adults do. When children write first, reading comes more easily." (1985, 2)

Children can learn to read and write just like they learned to talk. Donald Graves and Virginia Stuart explain:

> The natural process of learning to talk provides a valuable model for learning. The model can be seen at work in any skill we learn without being taught: talking, walking, riding a bicycle, or jumping rope. All these processes have several things in common. Children have a clear purpose

for learning each one and a clear goal to reach toward. Because they want to talk and walk, for example, children practice on their own. (1985, 9)

The best way to teach writing for children is by letting them do real writing, not worksheets. Graves and Stuart explain their thinking:

> The component model of learning is based on a seductive idea: to learn how to put something together, first you take it apart. This concept clearly works in the physical world of things and machines...But a growing body of research shows that children tend to learn language, oral or written, by moving from wholes to parts; they focus on meaning before mastering the fine points of the form. (1985, 11)

They further state:

> Overemphasis on components, however, does more than train children to dislike reading and writing. In denying them the opportunity to practice actual reading and writing, the method prevents children from using important thinking skills, such as organizing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating information. Instead, standard worksheets and tests ask children to fill in the blank or circle the correct answer. (1985, 14)

Setting Up the Environment

Just like a gardener prepares the ground before he plants the seeds, so must a teacher prepare the classroom environment so that the writing will bloom in it

Cambourne and Turbill have attempted to delineate conditions necessary to have successful writing process in a classroom. The ideal would be to have all of these conditions in a high degree. These conditions include: "Immersion in print, good modeling

of reading and writing, positive teacher expectation, student responsibility for writing and lessons learned from that writing, approximation --including spelling and composing the written word, time to practice skills, engagment with demonstrations about print, mutual response between students and adults in the room." (1987, 7)

Setting up routines early on will allow children to get to the business at hand without getting sidetracked on mundane issues. The room must stress independence and the children's own responsibility for their writing. All must know: where to get supplies, writing folders, sign up sheet for conferences with the teacher , what to do if you cannot spell a word, need help with punctuation, stuck on topic, don't know what to do next, need a listener, or writing is finished for the day. Avery says, "Writing workshop is actually a highly structured environment, carefully established with clear rules and procedures that continue to develop throughout the year." (1993, 14) ...Avery adds that there are three basic rules: "We work hard, we work on writing, and we use quiet voices." (1993, 14)

Katie Johnson's two main rules for writing are: "Children's writing comes from the children themselves, or it has no power; and the teacher must feel comfortable with the way writing goes in her classroom,or it won't work." (1987, 237)

Donald Graves set up his writing groundrules this way:

1. When I'm writing I don't want to be disturbed.
2. Choose three topics or so, talk with your neighbor if you wish.
3. Now write.
4. There are limits set on the numbers of persons who share; carefully listen to the one person speaking.
5. Writing (all of it) is kept in a set place (your folder) and in a set location (the

box at X point in the classroom.

6. We will be writing and sharing again tomorrow -- your work and mine. ((1983, 17)

The writing itself is treated as sacred. Nothing is thrown away. All is kept to perhaps be used at a future time for an idea, a sentence, a new topic. This adds value to all writing process, and gives a sense of ownership to the author, since the decision on what to use next will be the writers.

When Graves and Stuart say:

> In a classroom where teacher and student work together in a spirit of collaboration, they can usually find a common ground in which children are eager to learn many of the things that teachers are eager to teach...
> In order to strike up a collaboration, a teacher must uncover the knowledge and interests the children already have. (1985, 19)

They are saying something crucial. If this collaborative environment can be set, there will be cooperation and support among the members of the class as each member struggles to find as Johnson says those "organic words...key words, the child's first words to read and write, caption his most important images, images that are part of his mind and soul." (1987, 4)

Susan Fleming sets forth these common sense strategies for dealing with childrens' writing efforts. Although her advice is for parents,, it can still apply to the classroom:

1. Remember the way your child learned to speak.
2. Take her work seriously.
3. Ask her to read her story to you.

4. Accentuate the positive.

5. Meaning is more important than mechanics.

6. Show that you appreciate the paper.

7. Reading helps writing.

8. Encourage your child to write frequently.

9. Don't judge your child's writing by professional standards..

10. Be patient and confident.(1986, 153-154)

Lucy McCormick Calkins has some wonderful ideas on how to make the classroom exciting, vital, and filled with ownership by its students:

> Imagine the message we would convey if we began the year by asking everyone to bring photograph albums from home and spend an hour in twos and threes sharing the moments and people in our lives...Instead of stapling scalloped edges and cardboard horns of plenty onto our bulletin boards, we might let youngsters use bulletin boards as a place for announcements, jokes, news about ticket sales, displays of artwork, writing, quotes and posters, maps and photographs. (1991, 12)

Calkins also has some great suggestions on how to get the stories- nuggets of ideas for great writing- started in a classroom. She says to start the writers' workshop by telling everyone to settle comfortably in a circle and say:

> Today, and often, we're going to share stories, memories, moments. In every family there are stories we tell over and over. These are stories that hold us together as family; stories of coming to America, of how one child got his name, of the day we found a turtle on the highway, or

named our dog, or got stuck in a rainstorm. (1991, 28)

Calkins also suggests bringing in shoeboxes of personal treasures to share with the class. Everyone, at every age, has a box of junk stowed away somewhere with stuff we just couldn't bring ourselves to throw away. We tell the important stories of our lives when we share the treasures in our shoeboxes. This is an excellent way to let the children find for themselves that they have wonderful things in their lives that belong only to them to share.

The organization of the writing time itself is up to the teacher's personal preference. It should be daily if possible, or at least three times a week. The children should come to expect the same time each day for writing. This routine will enable them to get into the writing process more readily. Some teachers have one half of the writing time allocated to conferencing with others, and one half of writing time is silent writing only. In this way the classroom will take on the hushed silence of a studio where all can be alone with their own thoughts. This can be a more productive environment for writing.

Writing with Lower Primary Grades

Special strategies can be used to encourage writing in lower primary grades: kindergarten, first, and second.

Katie Johnson's *Doing Words* (1987) is a step by step process to enable early learners to get started putting their thoughts into the written word. Her method has six stages:

Movement I--After talking with the teacher, a Key Word emerges. The teacher writes the Word on unlined oaktage card for the child. The child then traces it with his finger, and reads it to class. Words are kept in large manila envelopes and the collection is

read everyday. By Christmas, the average Kindergartner has between thirty and fifty Key, personal words.

Movement II --Is done the same way, except words are sentences. These are longer captions for Key images of the child. The teacher writes; the child traces and reads. Everyday cards are read to a friend.

Movement III--The stage uses sentences chosen by the child in a conference with the teacher, but now the teacher writes on a lined card. After tracing it, the child prints it on lined paper. Papers are read everyday, before and after the new sentence.

Movement IV--Now the child is printing two or more sentences after a conference with the teacher, and the words needed for that printing are written by the teacher on a large card in a list. The child retrieves the words and prints them in a booklet made of lined paper. The booklets are read. This is usually the last movement in kindergarten.

Movement V--This movement extends the retrieval of words to a personal dictionary. Stories are written independently and often continuing from day to day. Each day's work is read, and stories are posted for others to read.

Movement VI--This incorporates the whole writing process, adding revision and editing, and group peer conferences to the teacher's conference, Drafts and publishing is continued from Movement V. Children may write in either a booklet or on many papers in a folder. As the children come to use the writing process exclusively, the differentiation of genres and audience is expected in their writings.

"None of the lines between the Movements is rigid," Johnson explains. "It sometimes happens that I guess wrong about where a child can best work, but the longer I teach writing the less often I guess wrong. When you goof, just back up one Movement and

things will be fine. ..Where you start depends on what grade you teach and how much language awareness has preceded your tenure of any group."(1987, 15)

The routines of this program are fairly easy for small children to grasp: choose a word, the teacher writes it, the child traces it, reads the word, then reads it to a friend, and puts it in a basket. When all students have words in the basket it is time to read. All the words for the day are shared in an all-class group. The words are passed around the circle until all have recognized their words. Each word has the child's name written by the teacher in the left-hand corner of the card. The teacher chooses someone to read first. That child chooses someone next, and so on. Each child puts their own words in their own envelope for the day. Once a week they read all the words to teacher. If a child does not remember a word, it is removed. The teacher says, "This one isn't very important," as it is being removed.

I have seen this model for writing used in the Carmel School District with great success. Johnson says "One way to start a child in Movement 1 is with fear or love words" (1987, 20). Anything involving these emotions will have power for the child, and usually bring an immediate response.

In room management, Johnson advises, "If they have not had much training in working independently, it is best to have them stay put and you circulate." (1987, 17). This way the children stay on task , rather than wander, and the room noise will be less as there will be less visiting while going to sharpen a pencil or other related task.

In Italy, much the same type of instruction is going on as in America with a few variations. One key difference between Italian education and ours is that the teacher stays with the same group of children for the entire elementary experience, teaching all grades.

There is a definite advantage in getting to know the students well, and following their progress through their primary years. One would get to know the student's weaknesses, strengths, strategies in attacking a problem, personal preferences. All of this would help the writing program immensely.

In Italy, Tutolo says, "In grade one, writing instruction comes first and reading instruction is an outgrowth of writing instruction. It was easy to note progress, for children write in a copybook called a 'quaderno' thus compiling a permanent record of progress for review and comparison," (1984, 5)

The Italian writing lesson will begin with a language experience--either vicarious or actual. The class may take an observation walk together, cook something together, or be told an oral story of their culture. The teacher will then focus on a key sentence which summarizes the experience. This becomes the focus for the writing lesson for the day. The children will copy the key sentence in both cursive and manuscript, which is taught simultaneously. They will then draw a picture to illustrate the sentence. Adequate time is always provided for these tasks. In October, the teacher will dictate rather than model the key sentence. By December, most students have made the transition to free writing with teacher help as needed.

Tutolo says:

> I would like to summarize reasons why I believe beginning writing instruction is so succesful in Italy and offer suggestions for curriculum modification in our own country. (1) In Italy writing is an important component of the language arts and needed time is allotted for thought,

reflection and composition....(2) The classroom activity curriculum promotes writing through teacher pupil planning and group interaction in a cooperative noncompetitive setting....Lastly, there is an expectation that children will learn to write successfully in Italy and this expectation seems to contribute to the desired effects.(1984, 14)

Brian Cambourne and Jan Turnbill delineate coping strategies children use:

- . Use of related activities
- . Use of environmental print
- . Use of repetition
- . Assistance from and interaction with other children
- . Assistance from and interaction with teacher
- . Use of 'temporary' spelling. (1987, 9)

When these strategies are seen by teachers there is no need for alarm. The child is attempting to cope with a new experience before moving on to new challenges. For example, if a child draws, or scribbles, "He is using a related activity which allows him to meet the demands of the writing setting in which he finds himself." (1987, 10) If the child is using random use of letters, or copying environmental print but giving it another meaning, or copying labels around the room and drawing an appropriate picture, all of these behaviors are attempts to cope. If the child repeats picture items, or letter groupings, or whole sentences, or themes, he is staying with something he is comfortable with until he is ready take new risks.

Calkins has taken the writing folder one step further with the introduction of notebooks. She says,

> I show how notebooks have helped us discover the importance both of rehearsal and of writing that is meant simply to generate idea. I explore the ways notebooks have replaced our daily writing folders and daily rough drafts, and the ways they have helped us and our youngsters build the momentum necessary for larger writing projects. I talk about ways notebooks have given us a new sense of revision. In our workshops, revision usually begins with seeing themes and entries that have the potential to become more, then growing and writing our way into those ideas and collecting parallel entries about them,, and finally, standing on the shoulders of all we have written and read in order to write several pieces, usually with particular purposes and audiences in mind for each one. (1991, 31)

Writing with Upper Primary Grades

Children who have not had good writing experiences before they get to second or third grade will find it difficult. They will not have experience in finding those nuggets of importance, key events, which will start the words flowing. They may be used to having topics assigned to them, and will have difficulty finding a topic for themselves.

Katie Johnson says:

> Here is one way you might begin second or third graders on the writing process if they've never done it. The easiest way to start is to give each child a writing book, a dictionary of their own,a nd ask them to think about five things or adventures or ideas that interest them. Have them write these on the inside cover of their writing books..... Then

> set a timer and ask them to write for six or seven minutes, and you do it
> Take some time to share a little, a few writers, every day. You share too
> .Do this for a few days, just to get wet feet. Be relaxed. Then you can
> begin a more formal and systematic introduction of the writing process,
> perhaps witha prewriting activity. The prewriting strategy that children
> use with great success and glee is webbing, also known as clustering.
> It's fun. All you need is one word. This must be modeled several times,
> but every time will be a lot of fun, and it will teach the children not to be
> afraid of thinking. (1987, 224)

Topic Choice

This may be the hardest part of all writing - topic choice. Once the idea is there, and the first few words are written, it is all downhill from there. Anything teachers can do to get children past the point of staring at that blank page, and having that blank page stare back, is of crucial importance. After a few successful tries at writing, children will begin to see themselves as writers. We need to get them there quickly, before they decide writing is not for them.

> Graves models choosing a topic himself:
> Show the children how you go about making your topic choices.
> Children believe that adults do not struggle with their writing, least of
> all the choice of a topic. Number your paper from one to four and tell
> the children to do the same. Write down two topics and tell about your
> interest in each as well as the process you used in choosing them. Give
> them time to do the same. In this instance, children do not have to come

> up with topics in the personal narrative. You use this as a model simply because it is the easiest place for most children to begin. After writing down the two topics and discussing them, do the same with another two. There is a specific reason for choosing four or at the least three. Four topics lead to expanded thinking; most children come up with at least two. On the other hand, it is more difficult to come up with one topic, because this is more convergent thinking. Children who strive for one topic, often end up with nothing. Tell the children why you have chosen your one topic from the four. Speak of what you hope to find out by writing. (1983, 13)

Donald Graves recommends starting right out with seven through eleven-year olds by saying:

> Take a few moments and think about which one of your topics you'd like to choose. Talk it over with a friend if you'd like. In about four minutes we'll all begin to write. If you don't have a topic yet, just write, write about anything. Write about something that happened yesterday. Let the words go down on paper. In time a subject will come to you. (1983, 13)

Graves advises teachers to get to know the children quickly and document your findings. Make a list of each child's possible experiences and interests you have noticed. Also note confirmation incidents of those interests. This will help the teacher set up territories of knowledge for the children to own. Let the children help each other. By sharing, they will realize what is a "hot" topic, strong in voice, and perhaps be copied by others in the group. Future topics can be noted on the inside of the writing folder as they

come up, to be used later in the future.

> Some topic choices will not be good ones. Graves says:
>
> They search their lives and interest, make a choice, and write. Some of the decisions are poor onces. The topic could not be controlled, little was known about the subject, or the child chose the topic to impress another. They lost control of their writing. But with help, they regain control, make better choices. Above all, they learn to control a subject, limit it, persuade, sequence information, change their language...all to satisfy their own voices, not the voices of others." (1983,. 3l)
>
> Summing up the importance of topic choice, Graves contends:
>
> Writers write best on topics they really care about. Thus, free topics allow children to do their best work. Among the many topics a child chooses during a year, a few are special. These are topics that, for one reason or another, really excite the writer. An excited writer is not only motivated, but also receptive to new ideas and techniques. (1985, 90)

Invented Spellings

Cambourne defines invented spelling: "As children continue to write using their temporary or invented spellings, they gradually proceed through a series of approximations to the conventional forms of spelling, experimenting with different unconventional versions of the same word." (1987, 24) On this controversial subject, there is even disagreement on what to call it! The term "invented spellings" was deemed to have negative connotations, implying inherent error. Thus the term "temporary spelling," implying that the errors would

not be long lasting, came into use. Teachers need to be comfortable with whatever way they choose to deal with spelling in their classroom, because these are the building blocks from which every child will construct their writing structures. The teacher must find a way to accept the spellings of her students in a positive, and encouraging way.

Some experts say invented spellings are an acceptable and necessary step in the child's development toward literacy. Others say children should learn right from the start the correct way to spell a word so that his words will communicate with others.

> Katie Johnson's problem with invented spellings is that the child is not: Using to write the language he will have to use to read. Another problem is that his learnings in phonics change so fast when he first begins to learn about sounds that he himself may not be able to tell what that says the next day. In that case, the teacher may feel called upon to annotate his writing with her version of it. If she's going to go to that trouble, why not just Do Words anyway, and have the added advantage that the child is using, and looking at, and working in standard English? (1987, 154)

Donald Graves disagrees. "A study showed that children spell better when asked to focus their attention on the meaning, rather than the structure of words."(1985, 168) "Poor spellers need to learn to understand their problems with spelling, but never at the expense of their content." (1983, 194) Children are able to start writing before they can read, by sounding out spellings as best they can. They need not be given any drills, worksheets, or standard lessons in phonics. He further explains that if too much importance is placed on correct spelling, children may never have any personal experiences with good writing.

> Most adults think children can't write until they successfully complete spelling, punctuation, and grammar exercises. But children can best learn these skills in the context for which they were intended: writing. (1985, 3)
>
> Correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar will generally make a good piece of writing more effective. But far too many teachers treat the conventions as their first, foremost, and, in some cases, only concern in a piece of writing. This attitude not only gives children a warped view of the qualities of good writing; it makes unrealistic demands on them.(1985, 36) Spelling is for writing. Children may achieve high scores on phonic inventories, or weekly spelling tests. But the ultimate test is what the child does under "game" conditions, within the process of moving toward meaning. Data show that when the mechanics of spelling dominate, when words do not flow from an automatic source, content suffers. The child does not feel free to reconsider to pick information, or the ordering of information. The effort to get it down in the first place is too great.!(1983, 194)
>
> Routman clarifies the most sensible approach:
>
> While whole language teachers may choose not to teach spelling formally as a separate subject, they do teach spelling. They expect their students to spell high frequency words correctly, to utilize reliable rules and patterns, and to apply spelling strategies in their dailly writing. (1993, 39)

Conferences

Conferencing, whether with just the teacher, one or more classmates, or the class as a whole, teaches the child to listen to how his words are received by others. Valuable

input from others will let the writer know whether or not he actually said what he intended to say. This can be a valuable learning tool for any writer. The teacher must be careful to model conferencing, so that this experience will be positive for all involved.

Conferencing among students is very important. "Children with a common task, seated in such a way that they are close enough to interact and talk and given the freedom to do just that, will make the best of the situation and draw on the knowledge and information of their peers", observes Cambourne. (1987, 28)

Sharing in a group should be kept very simple for beginning writers. After writing, the teacher may simply ask if anyone wants to read theirs, even just one favorite line. No more than two questions should be allowed per writer, as this is probably all younger children can handle. The children should be taught how to "receive (the work) in such a way that the child is teaching you about what he knows." (Graves, 1983, 14) First, the children will let the author know what his words said to them. Then children chosen by the author can ask questions about information they think is needed. As they gain practice in this, they can confer with each other. They will learn to find their voice in writing,and understand their function in the room. As some students gain expertise in asking questions, and receiving the piece, they can help others in the classroom with these skills.

The teacher needs definite skills to conduct a successful one-on-one conference with a student about his writing. She must carefully consider what she does and says in these conferences, as they will have a lasting affect on the student. Because of time constraints always present in a classroom, these conferences may not happen everyday which makes what transpires in these conferences even more important. Calkins advises: to "hold about six short conferences and three long thoughtful ones" per day. (1991, 231).

This allows the teacher time to reflect and do a good job with conferences. The teacher should never handle the writing itself, this would imply taking responsibilitiy for the piece literally out of the student's hands. The teacher should sit shoulder to shoulder with the student, so both can look at the piece simultaneously. Lastly, the teacher should wait 15 seconds after asking a question to give the student ample time to consider. Graves says:

> The teacher looks for a child's potential in the words used in conference, the content of the piece, and the way the child goes about the craft.. A teacher who looks for potential finds listening and observing an exciting venture. Rather than become anxious about the final product, the teacher who looks for potential sees possibilities in a shard of information about a child's chance statement on how to bait a hook, cook a roast, or two options contemplated in a new draft....Listening to children is more a deliberate act than a natural one. It isn't easy to put aside personal preferences, anxieties about helping more children, or the glaring, mechanical errors that stare from the page. I mumble to myself, "Shut up, listen, and learn."(1983, l00)

Graves provides some excellent guidance in asking questions that teach. "Opening questions depend on the child's experience with conferences." (1983, 108) An example of these would be: How is it going? What are you writing about now? Where are you now in your draft? "Following questions help children keep talking..As the teacher asks this kind of question, she listens and tries to build up a picture enabling her to ask other questions that will lead to more basic control of the piece." (1983, 108) The teacher might say, "You can't get started?" after following the student's information, and reiterating what

they say. "Process questions help children to stay oriented in their writing. :What do you think you'll do next? and "Where had you thought to start? are two process questions." (1983, 109) Development questions can show both the teacher and the writer the child's progress as a developing writer. Development questions might be: how did you go about writing this? Did you make any changes? What are you going to do next with this piece of writing? What do you think of this piece of writing? Questions that deal with basic structures force the child to "reconsider major relationships in information, and look at fundamental issues in a piece, or in the subject as a whole." (1983, 112) Some of these might be: "How will I know if it's a good story? Which of two stories do you think you would choose to have published and why? Before you go on to writing a new piece, is there anything else that you might do with this piece?" (1983, 113)

"Sometimes it is important to cause problems, problems that are solved outside of conference or in the next draft. The teacher notes that the conditions are right for the tough question: The voice is strong, the writing straightforward, the writer confident." (Graves, 1983, 116) Now the teacher might ask something like, "What does your ending have to do with your beginning? What did you want here?" (Graves,1983. 116)

Donald Graves tells us to avoid "the display question--that is, it is not a genuine question. The teacher already knows the answer; she simply wants the child to show that she knows it, too." (1985, 21) "Display questions that amount to oral guessing games are to genuine conversation as worksheets are to reading and writing." (1985, 24) When we ask questions about information only the student has, she will respond with authority and confidence.

Graves final advice is: "One should keep in mind that questions in conference are

asked sparingly." (1983, 112) No teacher wants to overwhelm a young writer with too much to handle. He also says, "Conferences are shorter when children learn how to control their own pieces. They work best when children can ask their own questions." (1983, 117)

Editing and Revising

Editing involves checking for spelling and so on, while revising is the process of expanding or changing the content of the story and its structure. Anyone can edit but only the author can revise content. Getting those words down on paper the first time for most is a struggle. The revising and adding on that comes later is also difficult. Children will resist changing things they have worked so hard on. They must be taught to have extreme pride in the finished product and want it to be changed til it matches the original expectations of the author, until it matches the voice inside.

Editing, or correcting for conventional spelling, puntuation, and grammar, can be done after the first rush of words are committed to paper. Children learn about apostrophes, capitalization, periods as they need them It is best to have them write on alternate lines so there will be room for revisions. Once they get over the initial shock of marring the appearance of the page with revisions, there are several tools they like to use. They can make editing marks, carats or stars, to indicate where to go on the paper to find additional writing. Children also like to use spiderlegs, lines of revised writing, taped to the side of a composition at the appropriate place. This tool allows them to concretely see where a piece of writing will go on the page,without spoiling the looks of the page.

Calkins describes how meaningful entries put into a notebook will eventually evolve into final compositions. These entries can come from a good phrase heard on the

radio, or a conversation. These entries can be reread, shared, not necessarily for revision but for further insight. Calkins explains the uses of these entries in the writing notebooks:

> I talk about ways notebooks have given us a new sense of revision. In our workshops, revision usually begins with seeing themes and entries that have the potential to become more, then growing and writing our way into those ideas and collecting parallel entries about them,, and finally, standing on the shoulders of all we have written and read in order to write several pieces, usuallly with particular purposes and audiences in mind for each one. (1991, 31)

There are many questions that can be asked to help a student toward revision in a notebook: What does this remind you of? Is there anything that is particiularly meaningful? Why did you pick this particular passage? What have you read lately that you would like to copy? What part of your notebook matters most? I'm wondering what kind of writing you would be most proud to publish? What are you discovering? Where is this leading you? What, of all this, stands out as worth exploring? As you reread this, does it spark even more ideas? Does what you say here connect with anything you've writter earlier?

Reading all different kinds of good literature to a class enables them to revise their own writings better. They will listen to someone else's writing with a more critical ear as they become authors themselves. By reading lots of different authors, children will learn to be aware of voice, and perhaps try to emulate styles of others.

Graves and Stuart give a good explanation of voice: "Voice is the print of the person on the piece. It is the way in which a writer chooses words, the way in which a writer orders things toward meaning. As writers compose, they leave their fingerprints all over their work." (1985, 37) They further explain that, "People who write with their own

voices are people who are not afraid to say what they mean." (1985, 38) Developing voice in writing can be done for early writers. Graves and Stuart explain, "Writers sometimes hear their own voices best when they talk. Teachers can help small children develop their voices by allowing them to talk a lot. They tell each other stories and share their experiences with other children." (1985, 104)

Young children can find favorite books to use as reference while they are writing and try to emulate the author. They can pretend the author is their teacher, and try to imagine the suggestions he or she might make for improvements.

New Directions

Sometimes, it becomes necessary for the teacher to point the students in a new direction when writing enthusiam in a classroom pales.

Interviews can be an interesting new source of writer activity.Interviews can be recorded into notebooks or folders for more information. This will also help writers to include someone else's voice in their writings. There are lots of interesting subjects available, from teachers, to siblings, to classmates.

Study groups can be developed with topics ranging from authors, picture book topics, genres, memoirs, to non-fiction studies. The topics can be self directed, and groups will be developed by interest. Resources used can be newspapers, pamphlets, or interviews.

Publishing

It is important to go to press within the first two or three pieces in the beginning to give a positive feeling of being published. The ratio will be lower for higher grades.

Graves informs: "Publishing is important for all children. And it may be argued that children who have space-time problems, with little audience sense, benefit even more from the publishing step." (1983, 55)

In order to move a class from languishing in notebook revision to publishing, it becomes necesssary to give a specific deadline to be working on a project. The teacher needs to be positive and supportive in these early attempts, and allow time for improvement later in the year.

Finding real-world audiences will help bring young writers to publishing. Older students can make tapes to go with their writing to provide read-along experiences for younger children. An older child who has written about learning to play baseball can be a resource for another child who wants to learn to play baseball. Children in one class can attend seminars given by another class. There can be poetry readings for families. Letter writing campaigns can be initiated between classmates, classrooms, building personnel, the community. All of this will encourage children to improve their writing for publishing.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Katie Johnson makes a good argument for using writing in all subjects to enhance learning:

> Ownership of a concept through concrete activity makes the connection necessary for the child to "learn" it...While they are Doing Words, children rediscover the language all the time. It can be the same for science, social studies, math, reading, public speaking, cabinetmaking, and anything else we try to subdivide ourselves into. Writing is, then, the paradigm for all the disciplines. (1987, 213)

Graves further extols the benefits of writing when children are allowed to do specialty reporting on some area of knowledge they have, such as knowledge of animals from living on a farm:

> Let experiences be concrete and children take on different understandings of information. It is easier for a child to learn to suspend judgment on something that is concrete, something that is rooted in his own experience. Children take more risks when they have a specialty, a "learning turf" that has been established in the eyes of other children and the teacher." (1983, 84)

Art and literature go hand and hand, one supports the other. When illustrating, children should be encouraged to write a short poem or paragraph to go with the picture. Writing also improves when drawing is included. In upper primary grades and beyond, students can use drawings as rough drafts for a story. If children cannot think of anything to write, they can try drawing a picture instead.

Janet Olson, interviewed by Lori Mammen, promotes the use of art and writing simultaneously:

> If adults did not interfere, children would naturally use both forms of commununication to tell their stories. Whole language teachers understand that children learn language in a variety of ways, not just in a typical language arts classroom, but throughout their entire day...Children are also learning and expressing themselves visually throughout their day in a variety of ways. Therefore, I think that children ought to be encouraged to write and to draw across the curriculum. (1993, 4)

Social studies lessons can be strengthened through writing. Through journal

entries, students can write letters to imaginary pen pals about what they have learned, write letters describing adventures they have had as explorers. These activities will make this subject have much more immediacy for the children than merely answering the questions at the end of the chapter in the textbook. Davis and others say, "Writing facilitated the learning process and was therefore time well spent. The findings further suggest that providing time for writing in social studies could save time spent on reteaching" .(1992, 397)

Science and the inquiry method lends itself perfectly to writing. Through daily observations, recordings, and illustrations, children are being taught to watch closely for changes. They can form ideas to hypothesize guesses on why something is happening. For example, I brought in some forsythia buds in early spring to a first grade class. There was still frost on the ground. The children were asked to draw and write about the changes they saw in the buds on a daily basis. These developed far faster in the warmth of the classroom than their compatriots did outside the classroom window. The children enjoyed this activity, and may retain their experiences with the forsythias much longer than they would have by only reading about plants in a science text.

Math, too, can be brought to life through writing. Children can compose their own word problems using items they find interesting, such as adding baseball cards, or Barbie Dolls. This will bring ownership and interest into the activity, while developing literacy.

Problems

The writing process requires everyone to cooperate and support each other in a classroom. Some classes do not work well together. The chemistry is not right. Rather than constructive criticism, hurtful comments are made a sharing time. Much personal

information is brought out when journals and folders are read. There needs to be a realm of trust among all participants. Risk-taking and striving to find voice in compositions will suffer in a hostile environment. The teacher needs to model and foster cooperative behaviors in a classroom.

Sometimes, topics will creep up in writings which are inappropriate for the school setting. These incidents can be anything from journal entries of a very personal nature, to body and bathroom language. Although the child has a right to communicate his thoughts in writing, how these writings are handled in a classroom setting need to be closely monitored by the teacher. Any topics which should not be detailed in school, need to be curbed quickly. Also, because of the very public nature of sharing writing with other pupils or the class as a whole, the teacher will need to protect each child's privacy.

When a pupil will only write on one topic this can be a cause for concern. Perhaps repetition is important to the child at this time. He may be readying himself to move on to uncharted territory, but prefers to remain with something he is comfortable with until then. The teacher can carefully note any changes in the writing in language, spelling, use of information. This will show whether the child is indeed developing. Again, students should be writing a minimum of three times a week in order to be at ease with the writing process. If all else fails, the teacher can ask the child why he has chosen to write on only one subject.

When a child refuses to revise any of his writing, several things may be happening. The topic may not be strong enough to make a desire for improvement through revision. The student may think that by doing something over he is lowering his status in the classroom. To some students, output is of supreme importance to them. They value

quantity more than quality. There may be some confusion on where to put new information on the page, or there may simply be too much information to struggle with. The teacher can assess whether a child is ready for revision or not by asking him what he plans to do next. In the lower grades, revision may be too difficult a concept for some to grasp until later on, after a year or more of writing.

Childen who are overly concerned with conventions are careful about neatness, and spelling. Their writing tends to be sterile with no voice. The teacher can help this student by showing the student what personal information he knows. By finding this student's territory of information, enthusiasm will happen;, writing will improve. Students with this problem, often come from homes where accuracy is prized.

Children who cannot find a topic are often older children who have had topics dictated to them all their school years. These students can get ideas by conferencing with classmates, looking at their writing folder to review future topics written on the inside cover. The teacher can also model starting writing on one topic and finding another topic in the middle.

The child who cannot complete his work is frequently out of his seat, bothers students nearby, plays with toys during writing time, and often has a messy writing folder. Graves explains, "Such behavior can have many causes. The most common is the child's own awareness of the discrepancy between what he intended and what is on the page." (1983, 89) The teacher can best help this child by treating him like a professional. He can be shown how the writing in his folder goes up and down. Even professionals have slump periods. The teacher can look to see if the child is in a transition. Is the child disillusioned because he stopped too soon, or were his intentions unreasonable?

If handwriting is a problem, the child can do a warmup copy of skating across the page with a writing implement, to get the hand used to traveling across the page.

Some students will be more reluctant than others at attempting to write unknown words. These students sometimes have parents with strong tendencies to avoid errors. Students with English as a second language often have a difficult time adapting to temporary spellings. These children need lots of time and strong teacher expectation to promote attempting invented spelling. The teacher can model the use of temporary spellings, and stress the fact that public writing will still need to be conventional so that all can read it.

Anne Graves and Rochelle Hauge say "Elementary and secondary school students with learning problems usually need explicit instruction in composition. They may also need instruction in using self-monitoring procedures such as the story grammar cuing system as they engage in story writing." (1993, 40). This system lists story parts: "Characters, Setting, Problem, Plan, Ending". The students can " Check as I Plan" and "Check as I Write." (1993, 39) Using this system helps special education students keep track of all the parts of their writing in an orderly fashion. Leavell and Ioannides also support special training: "Students with writing problems often have difficulty writing stories because they may not understand the interactions among the motivations, actions, and reactions of story characters. Explicit instruction in character development improves not only story writing skills but also their attitude toward writing." (1993, 45)

Stuart and Graves sage advice for problems is: "If left alone, they often find their own way to move ahead." (1985, 135)

Conclusions

There are many ways to encourage the writing process in the primary grades. I believe all of the strategies described here have value and validity. Whether or not these ideas will work depends on the students in the classroom. But largely, much of the success depends on the teacher. The teacher must show the students that she trusts them to own their own work. If tight controls are kept on the class, the writings will be tight also. Because no two students will approach the writing process in the same way, the teacher should have an arsenal of ideas ready to use. Any or all of the strategies I have described could be used in any classroom to prompt enthusiasm for writing.

Although I have worked in some school districts which claim to use the writing process as their model for literacy in the classroom, there is very little writing occurring. I attribute this to the teacher's fear of loss of control. With every pupil doing their own writing, it is increasingly difficult to maintain control of what is being learned in that classroom. Perhaps this is why in many classrooms there is only lip service being paid to the writing process. Ray and others describe the detriment to good writing when a teacher is "just trying methods rather than putting into place a new theory." (1985, 12)

No matter how writing is encouraged in a classroom, the teacher will have t o decide how she will handle spellings. Katie Johnson's Doing Words does not promote the use of temporary spellings. As a new teacher Johnson's methods might be very useful in a classroom with young children. Her methods are teacher oriented. As a teacher tries to decipher all her students' written thoughts, it would be easier to deal with conventional spellings. But, as a new teacher gains expertise, temporary spellings should be used. Temporary spellings would be much more meaningful for a young student struggling with

early literacy than having an adult give you all your spellings.

On the thirtieth anniversary of what is informally called "The Braddock Report" (1963), a book on what is known about writing, Jensen says: "We care more, we do more, we know more. But, clearly, our understanding is far from complete. (1993, 294) The final word on the writing process has yet to be written. There is still much more to be learned by teachers and students alike.

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